

The Paul-Henri and Erika Bourguignon Photographic Archives
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Haiti: Haiti: Art and Artifacts

Haitian art and artifacts are a part of the Bourguignon Ethnographic Collection. The objects pictured in this archive were acquired in Haiti by Paul and Erika Bourguignon. These are traditional items (drum, *vèvè*, textiles) and items connected to the so-called “renaissance” of Haitian popular art (See Rodman 1948, E. Bourguignon 2004).

The best known of the painters of the period was Hector Hyppolite. Photo [UH509](#) shows Hyppolite and members of his household. Hyppolite died in 1948 and the American sculptor, Jason Seley, then in residence at the Centre d'Art, was permitted to make his death mask, one copy of which he gave to Paul Bourguignon. It is now at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art of Cornell University where Seley was Dean of the College of Art ([UH508](#)).

Another important painter of that period was Wilson Bigaud. His painting, entitled Feasting of the Gods (*mangé loa*) ([UH510](#)) is shown here.

A number of artists of various levels of experience were brought together by the Centre d'Art. This institution initiated by the American DeWitt Peters encouraged “primitive” artists. One such young aspiring artist was Daniel LaFortune ([UH243](#)), who was befriended by Paul Bourguignon, for whose short stories he created a number of illustrations that remain unpublished. He was a teenager, close to the end of his secondary education. He spoke and wrote French and for a period corresponded with Bourguignon after the latter's departure. LaFortune saw himself as a “primitive” artist in spite of his education, and as a consequence felt discriminated against at the Centre. His situation reflected the deep division in Haitian society (see E. Bourguignon, 2004). He left the Centre d'Art in 1948, when that group began to break up.

Erika Bourguignon collected children's drawings both in Port-au-Prince and in Furcy. André Destin ([EH215](#), [216](#)) was one such young Port-au-Prince artist, one of whose drawings is shown here ([UH511](#)). A drawing by Christophe Belffonsard, a boy from Furcy, is also included ([UH512](#)). The children were given crayons to work with. Used to limited resources, the youngsters included several subjects on one sheet. The representation of a tree, shown with its roots, is patterned on the charts displayed in the children's class rooms. Representations of the Haitian flag are prominent.

Vodou rituals require the use of *vèvè*, ground-drawings made by the *oungan* (*vodou* priest), with various substances: white (wheat) or yellow (corn) flour and sometimes ashes. *Oungans* often have notebooks of such drawings. Erika acquired one such notebook. The three *vèvè* shown here ([UH503](#), [504](#), [505](#)) are taken from it and illustrate their diverse patterns. A simple *vèvè* is shown in ([PH477](#)) as part of the baptism of a set of drums in Furcy.

The drummer Ti Roro ([PH234](#), [235](#), [236](#), [237](#), [238](#), [239](#), [240](#), [241](#)) is shown with his drum ([RH242](#)) which he later sold to Paul Bourguignon. He later came to New York where he made a record and proclaimed himself "the greatest drummer in Haiti." The jazz artist Max Roach claimed him as a major influence. Some recordings released by Ti Roro in the 1940s and 50s, were re-released in Japan in 1994. Ti Roro died in 1980.

An unusual example of folk art is represented by two pieces of painted burlap which Paul Bourguignon purchased at a market in Port-au-Prince ([UH506](#), [507](#)). Unfortunately nothing is known about their production or possible use. LeGrace Benson (2001) has suggested that these abstract designs are magic squares and show Islamic influence.

References:

Benson, LeGrace. "How Houngans use the light of Distant Stars."

Haitian Studies 7 (2001):106-136.

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----- "Haiti and the Art of Paul-Henri Bourguignon." *Research in African Literatures* 35 (2004):173-188.

Rodman, Seldon. *Renaissance in Haiti: Popular Painters in the Black Republic.* New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1948.